



Newsletter – June 2015



Budget 2015–16

The budget for the next financial year, starting on 1 July 2015, is enclosed with this Newsletter. It uses the current repair and re-decoration costs to update estimated costs for periodic work in the next five year period until 2020.

As explained last year, the amount of repairs and maintenance needed now the Estate is over 25 years old is increasing, so costs are higher. For this reason, the Directors increased service charges last year and will set aside more as a contingency for unexpected repairs to reduce fluctuations in charges. This year, a parking area in St Benedicts Close damaged by tree roots needs repair, funded from the flats reserves.

In the next five years, all flat entryphones that have not yet been replaced are likely to need replacing, as they are life expired, obsolete and can no longer be repaired. Electrical safety checks are required by law every five years, insurance revaluation is now recommended every three to five years and flat walls will need to be checked again. We also wish to fit LED lamps and seal flat block communal area floors. Flat owners fund this work from flats reserves.

The clock tower and portico need some repair, and that is likely to increase as we get further from the renovation several years ago. More Estate paths also need levelling and repair. All owners fund this from Estate reserves.

The Directors explained the options at the 2014 AGM and owners voted to defer the next periodic work until 2020 to spread costs. As expected, this is leading to a small reduction in service charges for the coming year.

Charges reduce by over 16% for houses and over 2% on average for flats. Charges vary by flat block as they have separate reserves and some have a small increase, particularly small blocks. The average flat decrease is not quite as much as estimated last year. This is because the 2015 redecoration costs are higher than estimated in 2010 and so more needs to be allowed in 2020 too.

The intention is that charges will remain stable for the five year period, increasing by around inflation. Of course, this cannot be guaranteed if unexpected expensive maintenance is required.



LED lamps and floor sealing

Unfortunately, we cannot afford to replace the fluorescent strip lights outside flat doors with LED ones nor seal flat block communal floors at the moment. LED lamps cost much more than fluorescent ones to buy, the flats reserves have been depleted by repairs and the periodic work is costing more than estimated in 2010.

These will be the first priority as we start collecting funds into the flats reserves again in the 2015-2020 period. As soon as we can afford to change the lamps, the saving in electricity will cover the initial cost in about three years.

The Directors are also concerned that contractors may damage the lamps if the light fittings are not adjusted correctly. This would cause greater damage than the cost of the work. We will discuss this at the 2015 AGM.



Tree pruning

The sycamore, ash and cedar trees between Abbey Drive and St Benedicts Close will be pruned in July, subject to Council permission. A maple that has grown too tall will also be pruned. The oak tree in Rectory Lane overhanging Abbey Drive houses will be cut back as much as the Council has allowed in its permission.

This work over the usual tendering threshold was awarded to E Payne & Co because its previous quotes have been the most competitive. This was as owners permitted at the 2013 AGM.



Refuse collection

The Directors have investigated the option of private waste collection from the Estate as requested at the 2014 AGM.

One contractor quoted an unaffordable price that would add hundreds of pounds to everyone's quarterly service charges. However, none is licensed by the Council for domestic waste so this option is not viable.





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Periodic maintenance

Periodic flat and Estate repairs and re-decoration and the remaining flat wall repairs will be carried out between July and October.

The work will cover repair and re-decoration of flat blocks externally and internally, together with repair and re-decoration of the clock tower and repair of the top of the portico on Limetree Walk. While hoists and scaffolding are available:

- The less urgent repairs to flat block walls will also be finished.
- The roof of 18-28 St Benedicts Close will be repaired permanently (this was previously repaired temporarily from inside).
- Work will be done at roof and eaves level to 30-36 Abbey Drive to prevent pest entry.

After work over-ran considerably in 2010, the Directors decided before tendering to offer a 1% bonus for completion within 15 weeks and 2% for completion within 13 weeks (about 3 months).

Managing Agent Rendall and Rittner carried out the initial section 20 consultation required by law, and no comments were received.

Surveyor Hallas & Co specified the work and carried out a tender to five building firms. One declined to tender and one submitted a very high tender. The lowest tender was from the firm used for routine maintenance on the Estate, Polyteck, and it agreed to limit additional contingency to work where the amount to be done is uncertain.

Rendall and Rittner is carrying out the second section 20 consultation required by law. Subject to that consultation, the Directors propose to award the work to Polyteck as the lowest bidder.

The cost of replacing flat block soffits and fascias with uPVC ones is unaffordable and would take over 20 years before reduced maintenance costs made it worthwhile. The existing fittings will be repaired where required to prevent pest entry and re-decorated.

A rebate of £57 for 1-bed and £85 for 2-bed flats with maintenance free windows will be set against service charges by January 2016. This reflects costs saved by not painting them.



Safety during work

Work to flat blocks will use hoists if possible but, where hoists cannot reach and for safety in some places, scaffolding has to be used.

Polyteck will contact flat residents to arrange when you will be in to open wooden windows so that the edges and frames can be painted.

At other times while scaffolding is outside, you should keep windows closed or locked in the ajar position to prevent intruders from gaining entry. Neither the builder, the Management Company, nor our insurer will accept any responsibility if you fail to secure your property. Your own contents insurer may also refuse a claim if you do not take reasonable security precautions.

While work will be carried out safely, parents are reminded that building sites are not suitable as play areas and it is your responsibility to ensure that your children do not put themselves at risk by playing near building work or materials.



Parking during work

Some cars will need to be moved from their usual parking spaces temporarily for access.

Parking restrictions will be relaxed for the duration of the work only. Cars with valid Estate parking permits can park in any space without penalty. You should only do this if your own space is inaccessible and should return to the correct space as soon as it can be used again.

Vehicles without a valid permit, that are too large or causing an obstruction may still be penalised.

➔ Rendall and Rittner Online

<http://www.rendallandrittneronline.co.uk/Account/LogOn>

This service from the Managing Agent is being launched for St Benedicts so owners can pay service charges and receive messages online.

To register, email registration@rendallandrittner.co.uk

All other Estate information and services remain on the St Benedicts website.

